Teacher's Key

Why Our Best Ideas Come in the Shower: What Science Says (Level B2)

Vocabulary Matching

1 anecdotes = **N**
2 sponsor = **A**
3 wander = **H**
4 undemanding = **L**
5 incubation = **G**
6 replicate = **M**
7 generate = **I**
8 engaging = **E**
9 originality = **D**
10 constraints = **O**
11 occupy = **J**
12 insight = **K**
13 routine = **B**
14 hypotheses = **C**
15 evaluated = **F**

Fill in the Blank

1 anecdotes
2 sponsor
3 undemanding
4 incubation
5 generate
6 engaging
7 originality
8 replicate
9 constraints
10 occupied
11 routine
12 hypotheses
13 insight
14 evaluated

True or False

1 **True.** It covered 4,000 adults in eight countries.
2 **False.** It shows what people believe happens, not why it happens.
3 **True.** It is more active when minds wander or tasks are passive.
4 **False.** He says it is not the only network that matters.
5 **False.** Later teams could not replicate it; Steindorf's team found no advantage.
6 **True.** Only the moderately engaging clip helped.
7 **False.** They rated them as just as creative and important.
8 **True.** 81 percent compared with 23 percent.
9 **False.** A smaller boost remained after they sat down.
10 **True.** The reading says so in paragraph 7.

Language Focus: Noun Clauses and Embedded Questions

Example answer: Researchers are still asking **why ideas come in the shower**.

Comprehension Questions: Model Answers

1 It reported that 72 percent of 4,000 adults in eight countries had experienced new ideas in the shower and 14 percent sometimes showered to think. It is weak evidence about causes because a shower company commissioned it and it relied on self-reports, so it shows what people believe, not why it happens.

2 It is a set of connected brain regions that becomes more active when people let their minds wander or do passive tasks. Beaty warns that it is not the only network that matters, because other networks are needed to change, reject, or put ideas into practice.

3 People listed unusual uses for everyday objects, took a break, and then worked on the same problems again. Those who did an undemanding task during the break improved more than those who did a demanding task, rested, or had no break. An incubation period is a time when a problem is set aside but may still develop in the background.

4 They could not replicate the result. In 2021, Steindorf and colleagues at Heidelberg University used a similar undemanding task and found no advantage over simply working on the problems again.

5 Irving argues that the earlier studies measured how distracted people were, not how much their minds wandered freely. In his 2022 study, mind wandering helped people generate more creative ideas, but only during a moderately engaging comedy clip, not during a dull video about laundry.

6 A moderately engaging task places light constraints on thought, which gives a balance between purely focused thinking and completely free thinking. Focused thinking limits originality, while completely free thinking produces associations that are rarely useful.

7 About 20 percent of the professionals' most important ideas came while they were thinking about something else, and they rated these ideas as just as creative and important as ideas from focused work. The main limit is that the ratings were the participants' own judgments.

8 In the first experiment, 81 percent of participants scored higher on the unusual-uses test while walking, but only 23 percent improved on a test with one correct answer, and a smaller boost on the unusual-uses test remained after people sat down. This suggests that walking helps most when people produce options, not when they must find one solution.

9 An idea that feels brilliant may still be wrong, so it has to be checked with focused thinking. The reading suggests comparing people in a real shower with people washing dishes.

10 Not Given. The reading gives the number of people in the walking experiments (176) but says nothing about who they were.

11 No. The writer says the effect is not limited to showers and gives walking as another example.

12 To show that the evidence is mixed, so readers do not treat one famous study as proof, and to explain why Irving's idea about moderately engaging tasks matters.

Notes on the Evidence

- Sources checked (September 2026). Survey: trade press reports of the Hansgrohe release (KBB, November 21, 2014; Plumbing and Mechanical, January 2015; Contractor): 4,000 adults aged 18 to 64 in Brazil, China, the US, the UK, Germany, South Africa, France, and Spain, conducted by ICM Research, commissioned by Hansgrohe, with Scott Barry Kaufman described as contributing; 72 percent and 14 percent. One trade report says the survey was developed for the launch of a Hansgrohe shower range. Baird et al. 2012, Psychological Science (Unusual Uses Task; undemanding task beat demanding task, rest, and no break on repeated problems). Failures to replicate: Smeekens and Kane 2016; Steindorf, Hammerton, and Rummel 2021 (Heidelberg University, Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts: no group difference in the incubation effect), as summarized in PMC review articles. Irving, Mills, and colleagues 2022 (UVA Today release; ScienceAlert): comedy clip versus boring laundry video; Irving's comment that earlier studies measured distraction is from the UVA release and several outlets. National Geographic (Stacey Colino, 2022): Beaty and Christoff comments. Gable, Hopper, and Schooler 2019, Psychological Science (APS summary): about 20 percent of important ideas during other activities, rated as creative and important, more often described as aha moments; self-report limit noted by the authors. Oppezzo and Schwartz 2014, Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning, Memory, and Cognition (abstract): 176 participants, 81 percent improved on the alternate uses test and 23 percent on the compound remote associates test in Experiment 1; residual boost after sitting in Experiment 2.
- Discrepancies and limits. Sources describe Irving's boring video as a man folding laundry or two men hanging laundry; the reading says only a dull video about laundry. Irving's 2022 sample is given as 222 in some reports and over 300 students in another; the reading gives no number. Gable's total sample differs between reports (98 in the first study; 185 across both in one report); the reading gives no total. The Poincaré anecdote is from his own account; one secondary source dates it wrongly, so no date is given. Dopamine, alpha waves, and time-of-day claims appear in popular articles without primary citations. No study found tests showering directly. In 2024 Irving began a partnership with the cosmetics company Lush on a shower routine; this commercial link is not in the reading but is worth knowing when judging later publicity. The unit is general information about research, not medical advice.
- Revision (September 2026). Corrected the walking paragraph: the previous version placed the residual boost after the single-answer result, implying it applied to that test; it applied to the unusual-uses test (Experiment 2). Added that Baird's 2012 result failed to replicate (Steindorf et al. 2021, Heidelberg), which the previous version omitted and which changes how strongly the reading can rely on it. Replaced the vague survey description (secondary blogs, year unclear) with trade-press details: 2014, eight countries, ICM Research, commissioned by Hansgrohe for a product launch. Moved Irving's distraction comment from a tabloid source to the UVA release. Added the Gable, Hopper, and Schooler diary study as real-world evidence, and Kalina Christoff (Canada) and Heidelberg as non-US perspectives. Vocabulary: dropped random, added replicate. Comprehension, True/False, speed questions, IELTS items, and resources were rewritten to match. The Hindi and Arabic translations have not been checked by a native speaker.